InterspecieS

It's Spring 2005

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Our Last Newsletter

Not really. Readers of the *Interspecies Online News* are amply aware that the Interspecies Newsletter is alive and well on the Internet, reaching an ever-expanding community of subscribers. Our new email format seems more democratic than the published version. Anyone can receive it – you just email beluga@interspecies.com and ask for it. Online readers don't need to contribute money to help allay the printing costs. There aren't any printing costs. I send it out once a month instead of quarterly. Interspecies even has a donated account provided by our local host, Rockisland.com.

The online news also has the entire Internet from which to draw its stories. Each issue is formatted with lots of links. You click on a headline to be redirected somewhere you can't always imagine.

For just one example, I recently found a story from the U.K. that provided a large and detailed chart of precisely how many whales in the world have been killed since the International Whaling Commission established its so-called worldwide whaling moratorium back in the 1980s. The chart lists species, numbers, and countries. You might easily regard it as the quintessential height of discouraging news. But if so, you also need to understand it as essential information for all of us who care about cetaceans. It becomes worthwhile if only one reader decides to do something about the chart's transparent conclusion that the IWC is woefully ineffective in its attempt to legislate global ocean politics.

And if you still prefer to read the printed version of the Interspecies newsletter? There's a solution for you too. For the next several months, you can download this issue, as well as several recent printed newsletters as a .pdf file. That means you can print them out on your own inkjet. It's easy to do. And the .pdf version comes with the usual banner head, images, and even typos.

Click the Elephant

Interspecies relies on public donations to prosper. We have just made the process of supporting this organization a lot easier and more direct for our online supporters. We also believe in the old adage that the gift must keep moving. In return for your donation, we will send you the print of your choice from the new Interspecies art gallery.

Here's how it works. Go to Interspecies.com. Click on the elephant to get redirected to the Interspecies Art Gallery. This gallery is currently displaying several animal portraits. By May, it will double in size, to display a dozen wavelet graphs.

Determine an amount you would like to donate to interspecies. Click the donations button to complete a secure credit card transaction, using the PayPal system. If the amount of youre donation is $60 or more, you get to choose up to two prints. We'll email you regarding the titles and sizes you want. Within a few weeks, you'll receive your art print signed, numbered, protected in a printer's envelope, and rolled up in a mailing tube.

The art is printed in the Interspecies office using archival inks on museum-quality paper. The capability to accept credit cards is something new for us. It works flawlessly.

Adding the credit card capability also gives us something unexpected:a genuine sense of hope for the future of Interspecies. Suddenly we are able to receive instantaneous donations from anyone with Internet access living in any of twenty-five different countries.

A word about the art. I have been keeping a sketch book on various Interspecies field projects for thirty years. These sketches include everything from Zebras to beluga whales, to pelicans, to apple trees. The black and white pen and ink images are digitally scanned, and then transformed into full color in Photoshop.

These animal portraits are emphatically collectible. They are currently displayed in several galleries, and two of the images have appeared on CD covers. One of the images, *Orca Nightime*, recently won the Orca Adoption Program Prize, and was subsequently printed postcard-sized, and sent out as a thank-you to 4500 Orca Adoption sponsors worldwide.

So try it out for yourself, and get a piece of original art in return.

The Belly of the Whale

If this online venture sounds good, then please take a listen to how the interspecies website actually *does* sound. Audio has always been at the heart of the Interspecies work in the world. Suddenly we can share the sound interactions with anyone who browses our website.

We currently have about thirty audio files embedded in various pages. You can listen to cachalots clicking mysteriously off the Azores. Or decide for yourself if beluga whales sound like giggling clowns in a Fellini flick, or if chattering pseudorcas off the Canary Islands resemble extraterrestrials discussing an advanced worldview to which humans will never be privy. Or listen closely to five hundred dolphins following a melody played by myself on a guitar off northern Britich Columbia. Or hear an ethereal interaction between three orcas and a Tibetan lama in prayer, recorded during one of Interspecies' celebrated Orca Projects. So on. So forth.

Our currently celebrated *Belly of the Whale Project* is also well represented. I'll repeat the mantra one more time. You have to go to Interspecies.com. This time, click on the Belly of the Whale. Listen to excerpts from twenty of the most distinguished digital composers on the planet, all of whom have contributed their music to this fast-growing Interspecies project. Within the next six months we'll begin to feature music videos produced by artists in Holland, Finland, France, U.K., and the USA to accompany these compositions.

A Big Deal for Us

On August first, a new webpage makes its debut on Interspecies.com. If it does its job, it will dramatically enhance our potential to operate in manner less dependent on soft money.

For the past year Interspecies has been working closely with one of the most innovative music software companies in the world, *Native Instruments* of Berlin Germany. We are directing NI to help us design and implement a computer kiosk for the upcoming EXPO in Aichi Japan. The original commission for Interspecies to produce this multimedia whale exhibit was proposed and won by our long-time Tokyo sister organization, ICERC–Japan.

The musical instrument we designed will be displayed on a computer kiosk. Recently, NI's artist's relations director, told me that the instrument expands the capabilities for NI software to such an extent, and to such a potentially new audience of eductaors and curators, that the company has asked if they may distribute it on their homepage as the featured example of what is possible using the next version of their flagship product, *Reaktor 5.0*. The last time NI placed a third-party instrument on its homepage occured at the debut of *Reaktor 4.0*. That instrument was downloaded by over 200,000 users in the two months. Read on. The news gets better.

Donationware

The kiosk makes its debut at one of the main EXPO pavilions on August first. Also, on August 1, NI will debut the Whalesinger to its customer base as a featured

download on its homepage. The Whalesinger is being offered as "donationware".

An NI customer who downloads the software is immediately redirected to a page at interspecies.com where they can make their donation to Interspecies by credit card. The good news is that All proceeds will support Interspecies projects. We are asking NI customers for an amount of $25 or more, to be paid in any of 25 currencies by credit card.

I have added certain graphic features to the Whalesinger page to help educate the large community of NI composers and musicians, about the concept of creating art that somehow aids the cause of nature. It is Interspecies' guiding philosophy transformed into a disc jockey's beatbox.

Also, when the instrument gets put online, we will alert our online subscribers to download it for themselves.

So once again I say, send me your email address.

The Whalesinger

The musical instrument is now being called the *Whalesinger*. It allows a novice to create digital music utilising sounds that originate from aquatic animal sources like whales, dolphins, seals, walrus, fish, lobsters. While one part of the instrument creates rhythms, another part lets a person play a computer keyboard much like a piano to create melodies. These melodic sounds are the actual calls of three whales (humpback, orca, beluga) and a Weddell Seal.

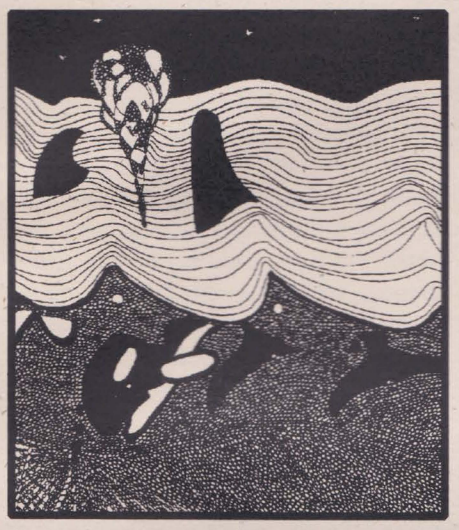
Instead of the stereotypical computer music display showing squiggly waveforms, our Whalesinger will display a swimming animal to identify the sound being played. Click on the whale, and an explanation appears onscreen to offer info about the health of that particular species.

Most of the whales featured on the instrument are in fact endangered, and one of these endangered species (cachalot) is still being hunted by the Japanese whaling industry. So debuting this instrument at EXPO will provide an entertaining method for millions of Japanese visitors to learn some crucial new info about whales, and presented in an engaging manner. The fact that this information is systematically kept out of Japanese media, gives our Whalesinger a certain insidious context. Hmmmm. Maybe I am the one person affected by the chart of all the whales killed to become motivated to take some direct action.

The fact that this instrument could easily provide a prototype for a new kind of interactive multimedia exhibit for museums and schools is not lost on us. Interspecies has recently proposed an adaptation of the Whalesinger to create a sonic journey through the natural environment of the Paxcific Northwest. The proposal has been accepted, and this summer, Interspecies will design and construct it for the Friday Harbor Whale Museum. The exhibit title is: *Puget Sounds*.

Magdelana

What else can I say about the Interspecies website and not run the risk of boring you. One of my favorite pages lets you look at photos from one of our recent field projects. Some of the images show four cachalots (sperm whales) facing head-to-head with their flukes pointing outward like petals on a daisy. The behavior is known as the Magdelana pattern.



Ironically, almost all the whale scientists who have commented about this mysterious behaivor have only witnessed it from an airplane, or worse, only read about it in nineteenth-century whaling logs. Nonetheless, they *all* insist that it is a defensive posture.

What we witnessed and photographed that afternoon off the Azores was emphatically not a defensive posture. The whales were singing the entire time, and my own well-tuned musician's ear began to hear distinct poly-rhythms emerge from what had seemed to be random clicking.

One member of our crew dropped into the water briefly, and swam near the whales. They didn't move. Our boat was dead in the water so the whales could have departed at any time. But two long hours after they first assumed the Magdelana Pattern, they were still doing it. Still singing. Heads still touching. We finally had to leave this scene because the sun was starting to set. I encourage you all to read the whole story at interspecies.com.

And after you read that page at interspecies.com, check out the *other* Interspecies art gallery that displays wavelet graphs of various whale species, generated by Interspecies consultant Mark Fischer. Some of beluga wavelets bear a striking resemblance to open flames. I personally love the poetic idea that studying whale sounds now resembles staring into a cozy campfire that just happens to be dancing in precise time to whale sounds.

So just do it. Email me at beluga@interspecies.com to keep connected. It would be a shame to lose contact with you after all this time together.

Personal Closure

I have been a working artist since I graduated college in 1969. Since 1981, this working artist has been paid roughly $1500 a month, to serve as the executive director of Interspecies.

The period between 1981-2000 was relatively easy to fundraise for Interspecies. There was a genuine support network out there for causes focused on issues of cultural change, aesthetics, consciousness, and specifically about consciousness issues that related to nature.

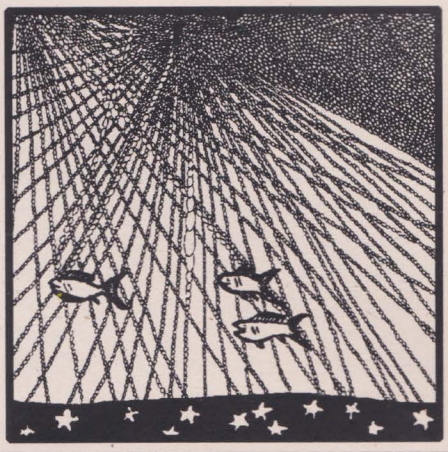
Interspecies was a happening endeavor. I pursued this work with great passion. and traveled the world's oceans to work with cetaceans. I had a stable group of sponsors who could always be counted on to put their checks in the mail on time. What a life!

Feeling immersed in a secure career, I built a home in a rural location where I sincerely believed I'd never have to rely on the local island economy to augment my income. I raised a family.

And unwittingly, I sure did paint myself into a corner.

Nonprofit Nightmares

The stock market crash of 2000 transmuted Interspecies and its projects into a more difficult endeavor to sustain. Many of the people who had so generously funded cetacean research ten years earlier were now staring at their own empty wallets. Other major sponsors turned fickle, perhaps viewing the economic upheaval as an opportunity to explore new horizons without feeling guilty about not looking back on what they had supported for so long. Consciousness was no longer the easy sell it had been ten years earlier. And I was starting to feel abandoned.



I turned 53 that year. 53 is an age when most men I know feel themselves slowing down. In my case, I found myself moving slowly, but inexorably away from the project-focused existence that had defined my professional life for so long. Over twenty years time I had produced literally dozens of successful field projects to some of the most remote locales on Earth to interact artistically with whales. It was done. I did it. It was my legacy.

Unfortunately, some of Interspecies most important sponsors were only interested in supporting these field projects. So there I was, caught in a Catch 22; feeling my biological clock kick in, yet realizing that it was going to kill my retirement. I even got mad at one long time sponsor via email. "How do you think I live, when I'm not out on some adventure?" I asked. "You have to trust me to use your sponsorship in the best way it supports this work over the long haul." He responded by essentially not responding. I never heard from him again.

As one good friend likes to say, blah, blah, blah.

The mail I receive these days makes it humbly evident that I have positively affected some people's lives. At least once a month I receive an email from someone, often from Europe, who once read some book of mine, accidentally discovered interspecies.com by doing a google search, and just wanted to let me know blah, blah, blah.

What else can I say to thump my own chest? I am generally considered a founder of the art movement known as *Earth Art*. I have played a well-camouflaged role in prompting biologists around the world to even consider animals as cultural beings. I love to write, and have been overjoyed to have had the opportunity to describe a dazzling array of interspecies experiences in books and essays. I have been filmed. Anthologized. Attributed.

But when you add up all the kudos, you also encounter my fatal flaw.

Floating and Floating

I have been floating and floating for thirty years in a profession where checks—sometimes from out of nowhere—arrived in the mail when I most needed them. I sincerely believe my life is blessed in the odd sort of way, best described by the old Rolling Stones tune: "You can't always get what you want; but if you try, you get what you need."

The ease of that support suggested to me that, on some cosmic level, I was among the chosen few granted the opportunity of manifesting the artist's dream while enjoying the fruits of a normal middle-class existence. I could never have continued for so long, and so earnestly, without implicitly believing the support would always be there. How else could I continue on such a risky career path? So I believed. And still do.

That last paragraph accurately describes, the mindset that has piloted Interspecies for almost thirty years now. It would have been too hard to keep myself psychically balanced, while constantly worrying that the checks might just as easily vanish in the next funding cycle.

Older and Older and Older

Now I am 58 years old. Who ever imagines, in this youth-

intoxicated culture of ours, that one day we all wake up with one lazy eye focused on the American elder dream of retirement? I can not say if I will ever be able to wake uyp in the morning with no money-making aspiration for the day.

The other side to this nonprofit melodrama is that the checks are no longer arriving.

Hearing of my current financial dilemma, a good friend responded by assuring me that 90% of all Americans are never more than two payments away from losing their home. I am also well aware that there is only enough food squirreled away in the United States to feed us for six weeks.

In my case, at a time when most of my contemporaries are seriously contemplating the great American perk of retirement, I have absolutely no idea how I will make a living in three more months, let alone in ten years.

This rant should help you to understand a little better why the published newsletter is a dead entity, and why I am now devoting my time these days establishing a web presence with credit card access.

I would love to hear some other ideas on how to make my future a little less business-like. You have my email address. Right?

The Main Point

This newsletter story about my developing relationship with Native Instruments, EXPO, credit cards, and PayPal, suggests a new chapter in Interspecies finances. If it happens as I expect, then we should be solvent again sometime after October.

Unfortunately, the Interspecies bank account is completely empty on May 1. So if anyone reading these words empathizes with this honest accounting, *AND* supports this work, *AND* possesses the wherewithal to keep Interspecies liquid for the next 6 months – until next fall when these ventures start to kick in – now is the time to send us a check.

HELP!

The Impressive Array

Once again I say it. This is the last printed newsletter. So does that mean I get to write anything I like? Sure, why not.

My wife Katy responds to my current dilemma with annoyed incredulity. "How is it," she asks, "that someone with your artistic credentials, is not allowed to continue being an artist, after all these years?"

"So what else is new." I answer with a shrug.

"What's new," she quickly adds with her usual flare for irrefutable logic, "is that the cost of living has gone up dramatically in the past five years, and we are still trying to make ends meet on a salary that is lower than what you received any time in the past 20 years."

If I have to take a job later this Spring in order to make it through this difficult time, Interspecies may be the one at risk. Who can work a mindless job all day long at $15 an hour, and still have enough energy left to return home and oversee Interspecies' intricate multi-disciplinary projects?

There are always going to be cheerleaders among us who make it their job to transform a statement like that last one into a positive challenge that a hero would meet AND AND AND CONQUER to show his or her true mettle. I might agree with that glass-half-full assessment if I was thirty. As it is, at this late date, I regard any bothersome postponement of my career as an artist – driving a bus, delivering firewood, selling hardware, whatever – to be as sure a form of slow suicide as if I suddenly started drinking to excess.

Does that make me a spoiled brat? I sure as hell hope not, because I write these words from the bottom of my heart.

Art in America

Innovative artists have never had an easy time of it living in America. Even as American culture turns its pop artists into wealthy celebrities, it effectively marginalizes the transformative arts. The mainstream Media does an excellent job here of educating Americans to believe that an artist can not be considered a success without also becoming wealthy.

The US government sets the tone. Public policy essentially treats art as a career path primarily worthwhile if it does, in fact, turn creative people into wealthy people. The fact that less than 1% of young artists ever do make a living, let alone become wealthy, is held up as a sign that Darwin was correct after all. When the culture at large lauds a creative person as an artist, you can almost be certain that person is either wealthy right now or is soon to be.

On the other end of the spectrum, exists a significant percentage of the general populace who once held a dream to become an artist. Some of them gave up early, did anything else to make a living, and yet continued to play music or paint as long as they live. Bravo! It is the personification of the best part of the American dream. You can do more than one thing with passion in your life. Naturally

this avocational focus puts an extra burden on those of us who are more ambitious in their art, and thus truly need a lifelong safety net to manifest their career choice.

In America, the only net our country offers is called fame. And it primarily gets strung up for artists whose work is very safe, or whose lives are very eccentric.

There is also a significant percentage of young aspiring artists who, as they grow older, do not (or in many cases) can not heel to the economic reality of the American art career. They hold on too long. It turns them poverty-stricken, bitter, mentally ill. I have personally witnessed this tragedy of creativity too many times among the talented people I have known throughout my life.

That the tragedy did not befall me as well, is the result of the one good idea I had in my life. What was it? When I was 22 years old I got the brainstorm to record myself playing music with turkeys as a Thanksgiving day radio show for the Pacifica network. After turkeys, came wolves. Quail. Kangaroo Rats. Dolphins., Orcas. And here I am, Still at it.

Celebrity artists neither need nor deserve government support. As the current right-wing administration sees it, the avocationalists group does not produce "art" that deserves a subsidy or welfare benefit.

The odd result I am now squarely facing, is that in America, there is almost no opportunity for an artist to prosper into old age as a denizen of the middle-class. My former sponsor made the same statement when he decided to stop sponsoring Interspecies because the projects were slowing down.

Every artist I have ever asked about it, agrees. The public support network is simply too risky a path to let creative people (who often have scanty grounding in finances) to keep at it into middle age and beyond, without any hope of a pension.

The European View

I recently discussed the American slighting of the arts with two savvy art patrons living in northern Europe. One of them, a German woman, explained to me that, in her country there is such a long tradition of honoring and heeding creative artists, that many more people tend to turn out to sponsor worthy projects that play with edges of perception. She described as a historical tradition that started with Teutons honoring their shamans.

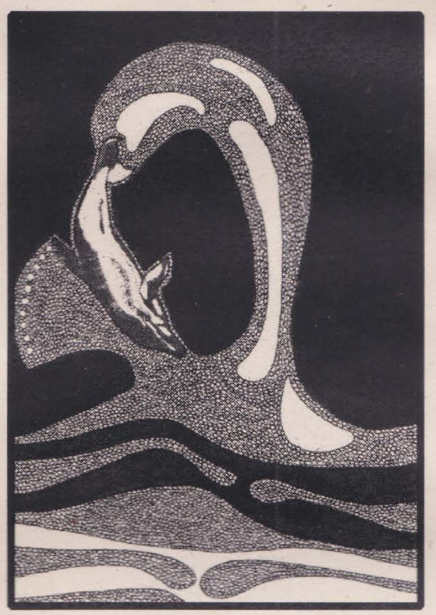
She herself, described older artists, as the elders of her culture. And in Japan some of these elder artists are designated as "Living Treasures." These are not pop musicians or celebrities of any kind, but potters, weavers, creative workers of bamboo and iron.

Another patron of mine, a man in Finland, demonstrated first hand for me how this tradition still works in Europe, and at the highest levels of government.

He once asked me to visit Helsinki to give a presentation about my work with whales. When I told him I could not afford the trip, he asked, innocently, if my local government would pay my way. I sighed in response. He understood.

So he told me to send him a budget. He later explained that he had taken my budget to Helsinki city hall,. Within a few minutes he was sitting in the office of the City's Municipal Artist's Deputy. The deputy listened to his request, and soon wrote him a check on the spot to pay for me, an American, to travel to Finland.

In Finland, in The Netherlands, and in Germany, an artist can go to the government and seek formal recognition for that career choice. If it is granted, the artist can count on government support for as long as he or she is productive. In Amsterdam, recognized artists help pay for this support by bequeathing to the government one representative



piece of art each year.

These are the thoughts that haunt the mind of this Americian artist as he grapples with checks that no longer arrive. These are the thoughts that make me worry about my lack of a pension, my inability to pay for health insurance, my concern to keep my two daughters in college over the next four years, and the sinking feeling that these bouts of poverty are bound to recur even as I bend towards my 60th birthday.

The Good News

I will not allow this final issue of the Interspecies Newsletter to wave goodbye on a bitter note.

About a year ago, I flew to Virginia on a magazine assignment to interview noted art historian Suzi Gablik. She spoke from a lifetime of experience, about the demise of the Modernist movement that dominated the Western view of what art is supposed to be during most of the twentieth century. She described for me the aesthetic elitism and the smothering commercialism of the entrenched gallery system.

Suzi ended with this question:

Is that what art is? Is it decorations and investments made to adorn the walls of galleries, museums, and the wealthy?

Suzi smiled to explain that there are vibrant art forms emerging right now that have little or nothing to do with decoration or the gallery system. This art is based on philosophical concepts that transcend the cult of "newness" that defined and eventually destroyed Modernism. This new art does not exist in art galleries. Much of it shows no products as the result. Nothing to hang, nothing to display, nothing to sell, nothing to make money from, and therefore nothing that the National Endowment for the Arts would know what to do with let alone sponsor. It is not created by the prototypical Modernist types Suzi refers to as "lone hero males." Ironically, this emerging art is often referred to as art only because the creators refer to themselves as artists.

Suzi Gablik is convinced that the two most important new trends of the early 21st century are:

a) Art to heal nature
b) Community Art

I only mention this here, because Suzi's interview had a profound effect on where I now plan to focus Interspecies future activities. I returned home from that interview, and immediately set to work establishing The Interspecies Belly of the Whale Project. Suzi agrees that this project offers a seamless merger of Earth Art with Community Art.

And like everything else my hands touch, it needs support.

The Belly Update

I run the risk of repeating myself to write that Interspecies has been commissioned to provide a multimedia installation about cetaceans for one of the main pavilions of the upcoming EXPO. I have been told that as many as a few million Japanese visitors may eventually experience this exhibit that provides an educational experience of whales as acoustic, cultural, and aesthetic beings.

The project has a list of corporate sponsors as long as my arm, although only one of them is actually paying Interspecies anything, and that money was long gone last Fall. Like so much else I have created through Interspecies, I did not ask EXPO for an amount of money associated with the work load. My work is unusual, it merges whales with aesthetics. To get it accepted, I have learned to know when i need to give a little to get a little.

Why not ask for more money from EXPO rather than whine about it in this newsletter? Well, if you recall, I am the guy floating in a dream where checks arrive automatically by mail. My clients know this, because I have been collaborating with them within Japan for the past fifteen years. They give me complete creative freedom and, so far, I have never let them down.

After 30 years being in reception of checks arriving to keep me alert all day long, I remain unwilling to give it up. Here's how it works.

Later today, as I do everyday, I will ride my red bicycle a quarter mile down a gravel path to Interspecies' big blue mailbox out on the main road. I will open the little door marked #301 with drippy yellow paint, and peek inside, looking for a check, something out of the blue, completely unexpected, a wonderful surpise, received from some unknown stranger who somehow realizes that his contribution, a small sliver of his own bulky wealth, will be immeasurably appreciated to keep Interspecies percolating.

That story should tell you better than anything else, just how tenacious I remain to keep hold of this improbable interspecies dream.

And to end this 27 year old newsletter on a completely random note. One of the most personally satisfying aspects of this EXPO ➠→ Native Instruments ➠→ Belly of the Whale project, is that the programmer I hired to help me program some whale images so they look animated, is a young guy who grew up with my eldest daughter. The circle continues into another generation.